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ABSTRACT

Through interview and questionnaire, this study examined the success of Brigham Young University's Indian education program by comparing it with Rouché's 11 elements of successful programs for low-achieving students. About 40% of Brigham Young's Indian students achieved bachelor's degrees, compared to 10% in comparable programs. The 19 faculty members interviewed identified most of Rouché's elements as contributing factors to their program's success and all emphasized the element of high administrative support which ranged from a separate academic department to financial awards available to all Indian students. Other factors singled out were specialized faculty, closely monitored courses, an academic advisement office for monitoring student progress, a special tutoring lab, a campus-wide Indian club, an annual Indian week, a news magazine, and a funding development program. Most instructors stated that Indians are visual learners and holistic in their learning approach. Some problems and concerns noted included weak family support, untrained study habits, limited student vocabularies, and cultural differences. The faculty recommended improved faculty preparation, and improved predictive tests. They also suggested development of Indian/Campus orientation programs, college-bound high school programs, improved monitoring programs, and the refinement of curricular offerings to include study skill courses, reading and vocabulary development, and career exploration. (PM)

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Native American Students



Elements of Success in a University
Program for Indian Students

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Brigham Young University
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Running head: NATIVE AMERICAN STUDENTS

Abstract

Nineteen faculty members, most of whom had twelve years of experience in a successful Indian program at Brigham Young University were interviewed. The program enrolls 500 students and graduates about 40% with bachelors degrees. About half of that group enrolls in graduate school. A questionnaire-interview procedure based on Roueche's 1982 national study of low-achieving college students was followed. Results identified important components of the program contributing to its success. They were presented under the headings administrative support, teaching-learning styles, and monitoring student progress. Results supported Roueche's study. Problems and recommendations concerning higher education for Indian students and the Brigham Young University program were presented. It was noted that most comparable Indian programs in higher education report a retention rate of less than 10%.

Faculty Perceptions of a University Program
for Native American Students

The literature of higher education programs for Indian students is very sparse. Less than ten references could be located in the ERIC system and few of those were data based. The best of the references by Nelson (1972) and Oakman (1976) discuss the cultural problems Indian students encounter when enrolled in traditional education programs.

The Brigham Young University Indian education program began with 40 students in 1966 and now includes about 500 students. It consists of nineteen full-time faculty with academic appointments, twelve staff personnel, and a department chairman who reports to the Dean of Student Life. About 40% of the students eventually obtain the bachelors degree and of that group, 44% have enrolled in graduate school. Graduates of the program, among others, include two college presidents, a former acting Commissioner of the federal Bureau of Indian Affairs, and a substantial number of state and tribal education administrators. Others have entered such professions as medicine, law, engineering, and social work.

The present study followed Roueche's 1982 national survey (Roueche, et al., 1984) of college programs for low-achieving students. In that study, 11 elements (Roueche, 1983) of successful programs were identified: strong administrative support, mandatory assessment and placement, structured courses, award of credit, flexible completion strategies, multiple learning systems,

volunteer (paid) instructors, use of peer tutors, monitoring of student behaviors, interfacing with subsequent courses, and program evaluation. For this study, with permission, Roueche's questionnaire was adapted to a questionnaire-interview procedure with the 19 faculty members of the Indian Education program at Brigham Young University. Most of the faculty members surveyed had taught in the program for more than 12 years.

The study found the elements indicative of a successful programs, as identified by Roueche, apply strongly to the Brigham Young University Indian Education program. Most of those eleven success factors appear in the findings of the study.

Administrative Support

The administrative decision to maintain a high level of university support was singled out by all 19 respondents as the key element in the success of the program. Support ranged from the formation of a separate academic department whose sole function was the support of Indian students to the establishment of financial awards available to all Indian students. A breakdown of university support is as follows:

Faculty

The selection of faculty members to teach basic skills and general education courses for Indian students ranked as an important ingredient by all respondents. These faculty members held dual rank in Indian Education and a discipline department,

(i.e. English, mathematics) and were hired primarily because of their proven teaching expertise with high school minority group students. Most faculty hold the doctorate degree, while a few hold masters. One is an internationally known publishing scholar in the field of biology. Another is nationally known in Western History.

Courses

All respondents mentioned the control of courses as another key element in the success of Indian students. Courses taught by the Indian Education faculty members include general education (usually lower division courses) in such subjects as English, mathematics, history, chemistry, biology, sociology, and health as well as basic skills courses in study skills, reading development, and career exploration. All courses award credit, are listed in the catalog and class schedule, do not deviate from departmental imposed syllabi, are recommended rather than mandated for Indian students, and are not restricted to Indian students only. Indian students however are given preference in enrollment in the classes taught by these nineteen faculty members.

Additionally, this department has offered a strong Native American Studies undergraduate minor, which has attracted both Indian and non-Indian students. The minor offers some fourteen classes, ranging from freshmen to senior level.

Financial Aids Office

This office works with Indian students in applying for tribal scholarships, government grants, foundation and corporation grants, and University awards. It also assists students in setting up budgets and in obtaining part-time campus employment. A substantial endowment fund from private sources has also been accumulated for use in the program. Most students receive financial awards which cover most if not all of their financial and educational needs when enrolled at the university.

Academic Advisement Office

As with all of the above items, the Advisement Office rated a unanimous plus factor as judged by the surveyed faculty members in the success of Indian students. This office is responsible for monitoring student progress, maintaining eligibility for financial aids and good academic standing in the University. It also assists with class registration and provides help in the selection of academic majors.

Tutoring Lab

Eighty percent of the respondents felt that the tutoring lab, which focuses primarily in English and mathematics, is a vital support source. Twenty percent, however, felt that the campus learning laboratories maintained in other academic departments could adequately handle all Indian students.

Other Services

Other services ranked high by the respondents included

(1) summer programs for high school juniors and seniors which focus on building self-esteem and emphasize career choices, (2) a campus-wide Indian club with elected officers and varied activities, (3) an annual Indian week during March which attracts over 7000 participants and spectators to various events, (4) leadership development courses and workshops, (5) a news magazine published four times a year with a circulation of 4000, and (6) a funding development program.

Teaching-Learning and the Native American Student

Although the teaching styles of the faculty vary substantially, ranging from lecture to class discussion to problem solving techniques, most surveyed teachers stated that Indian students are typically visual learners and holistic in their approach to learning. Current on-campus research by two members of this faculty suggest that the majority of Indian students tested by them operate primarily from the right hemisphere of the brain. So, although the respondents agreed that the learning style of the Indian students was different from that of non-Indian, there was no consensus of precisely what teaching style is most effective. Some advocated self-paced modules while others opted for group sessions or lectures supported by visual aids. Most all of the faculty did allow for special help sessions and practiced an open-door office policy to welcome students for individualized help.

As before stated faculty members for this program were chosen

because of their previous successful teaching experience. However, other faculty members from various departments on campus do volunteer to teach courses for minority students and frequently are asked to do so.

Peers are relied on heavily in the tutoring lab, in help sessions, and as dorm tutors and counselors for the summer programs. In most cases, these students are hired as part-time employees.

Monitoring Student Progress

Faculty members are instructed to report excessive absences, poor test scores, and homework delinquency to the Advisement Center. The Center then contacts the student to offer assistance through the lab or personal tutoring and counseling.

The Advisement Center through computer hook-up also monitors student grades and progress as well as reviewing the success rate of Indian students in courses and majors. When trouble spots are identified, help sessions, faculty reassignments, and restrictions on class size can be instituted.

Problems and Concerns

The interviews with the faculty members disclosed a number of problem areas and concerns. Some of these were somewhat unexpected to the interviewers; others supported assumptions that Indian educators have long held. The most frequently mentioned items include the following:

Vocabulary

Seventy percent of the respondents were concerned with the lack of proficiency in the use of English vocabulary.

Although many of the Indian students at BYU did not use English as the language of the home, they appear as judged by their conversational ability to have an adequate command of English. However, the ability to read the density of ideas and specialized vocabularies of college textbooks is usually deficient. Although no studies are available to gauge accurately the level of vocabulary proficiency, faculty members commented repeatedly on the inability of Indian students to read the textbooks with understanding. Some even wondered if the texts were read at all.

Over the past decade for example, one of the mathematics instructors has investigated data which indicates that Indian students have more difficulty in understanding the terminology of mathematics than they do in understanding the mathematical concepts themselves.

Cultural Adjustment

Nearly all of the instructors interviewed commented on cultural differences and the adjustments that are made by both students and instructors in order to promote an effective learning environment. Time management is an example. Another is self dependency instead of group dependency. Non-competitive

learning is still another value system. The importance of a college education in one's value system constitutes another. Further intensifying these problems are differences among different tribes.

Family Support

Some respondents pointed out the lack of family support. Not only is the distance from home to campus an obstacle, but the Indian student is often the first in his family to attend college. Many parents have limited ability and inclination to provide encouragement to a child in college if they themselves are functionally illiterate.

Study Habits

A majority of the faculty respondents cited poor study habits, lack of time control, and failure to establish long range goals including choosing a major, as serious impediments to the success of the Indian student. As a group the teachers were strongly concerned about the need for Indian students to have role models, to make early career choices, and to manage their study time effectively.

Recommendations

Among the recommendations that the faculty gave were the following. (1) Better preparation of prospective teachers of Indian students in order to understand cultural differences and to work effectively with the people of variant cultures. (2) Better predictive tests. If ACT or SAT scores and high school grades are

not valid predictors for Indian students, then what instruments or assessments can be used? (3) Refinement of curricular offerings to include better courses in study skills, reading and vocabulary development, and career exploration. (4) Development of an orientation program that introduces Indian students to campus, especially to the service offices, labs, counseling centers, and academic advisement offices that provide direct and immediate help. (5) Development of better techniques and/or programs to enhance self-esteem, leadership skills, motivation, and encounters with role models. (6) Development of college-bound high school programs that would assist Indian students in preparation, planning, and pursuing college admission. (7) Development of improved monitoring programs to track student progress and intervene promptly when problems occur.

Conclusion

In summary, the study offers support to the components identified by Roueche as typical of successful college basic skills developmental programs. Though the sample was small, the experience of the instructors, the size and long-term record of the program and its retention figures lend credibility to the findings. In the four areas of administrative support, teaching learning styles, monitoring student progress, and problems and recommendations, the study resembles other reports of college level developmental programs for low achievers in minority groups.

Special adjustments to the needs, culture, and problems of Indian students, however, must be superimposed on such programs to encourage retention in a field which averages more than a 90% dropout rate on most university campuses.

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